

## Defining Peacebuilding

by

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On 17 June 1992 the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali submitted a report to the 47th Session of the UN entitled *An Agenda for Peace* in which he gave political currency to the concept of peacebuilding. Four years later, on 30 October 1996, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy made an important speech at York University announcing the creation of a new Canadian Peacebuilding Mechanism and Fund. Between these two important political pronouncements, the international community responded with a variety of instruments and with varying degrees of success to a series of violent conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. Other conflicts went on relatively unnoticed in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sri Lanka. Still others, at various stage of conflagration, ebbed and flowed out of international consciousness.

As usual, reality continued to outrun policy, posing new challenges each step of the way. For the international community, still reeling from the divisive power politics of the Cold War era, peacebuilding came to symbolize the promise of a new strategy for responding to the twin imperatives of security and development in the post-Cold War international system. Yet, despite concerted effort, it has proved difficult to define what peacebuilding is and how it can best be promoted. Thus, peacebuilding remains an elusive concept, and an equally elusive policy tool.

Yet, because it has been catapulted into such prominence by policy makers with rising expectations of its utility, peacebuilding needs to be dissected more carefully in order to examine its underlying principles, its limitations and, ultimately, its promise as a policy tool to respond to the complex crises of the post-Cold War era.

It is important to point out at the outset that peacebuilding is predominantly an internationally-coined and promoted concept and it refers primarily to the international community's response to violent conflicts, threats of violent conflict or aftermath of such conflicts. It is evident that violent conflicts are issue and context-specific and have complex internal dynamics. Similarly, external responses to such conflicts are products of a complex set of international factors, with far-reaching ramifications on the ground. Peacebuilding, then, is the point of intersection between local realities and international response, what one observer has called the meeting point of "two anarchies".

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This brief paper attempts to bring some clarity to the concept of peacebuilding. The paper is intended to situate the evolving policy debate in Canada following Minister Axworthy's announcement of 30 October within the broader international discourse and practice on peacebuilding.

### An Agenda for Peace

UN Secretary General's *An Agenda for Peace* was explicit in its definition of peacebuilding, considering it as one of several tools at the service of the international community to deal with the threat or reality of war. It defined peace-building as a post-conflict activity involving "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict." It said:

"Since the creation of the United Nations in 1945, over 100 major conflicts around the world have left some 20 million dead. The United Nations was rendered powerless to deal with many of these crises because of the vetoes--279 of them--cast in the Security Council... With the end of the cold war there have been no such vetoes since 31 May 1990, and demands on the United Nations have surged. Its security arm, once disabled by circumstances it was not created or equipped to control, has emerged as a central instrument for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and for the preservation of peace. Our aims must be:

- . To seek to identify at the earliest possible stage situations that could produce conflict, and to try through diplomacy to remove the sources of danger before violence results;

- . Where conflict erupts, to engage in peacemaking aimed at resolving the issues that have led to conflict;

- . Through peace-keeping, to work to preserve peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers;

- . To stand ready to assist in peace-building in its differing contexts: rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war;

- . And in the largest sense, to address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression. It is possible to discern and increasingly common moral perception that spans the world's nations and peoples, and which is finding expression in international laws, many owing their genesis to the work of this Organization."

*An Agenda for Peace* identified the distinctions and linkages among the various tools. Preventive diplomacy includes measures to build confidence, fact finding, early warning, preventive deployment, demilitarized zones. Peacemaking encompasses the long list of techniques for peaceful settlement of conflicts embodied in the UN Charter and other international agreements, mediation and negotiation, resort to the World Court, sanctions, use of military force, peace enforcement operations. Peacekeeping involves the positioning of UN troops between warring adversaries following a formal cease-fire and with their explicit consent. The document then elaborated on the concept of peacebuilding:

"Peacemaking and peacekeeping operations, to be truly successful, must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people. Through agreements ending civil strife, these may include disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and the possible destruction of weapons, repatriating the refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.

"In the aftermath of international war, post-conflict peace-building may take the form of concrete cooperative projects which link two or more countries in a mutually beneficial undertaking that can not only contribute to economic and social development but also enhance the confidence that is so fundamental to peace....

"In surveying the range of efforts for peace, the concept of peace-building as the construction of a new environment should be viewed as the counterpart of preventive diplomacy, which seeks to avoid the breakdown of peaceful conditions. When conflict breaks out, mutually reinforcing efforts at peacemaking and peace-keeping come into play. Once these have achieved their objectives, only sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems can place and achieved peace on a durable foundation. Preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis; post-conflict peace-building is to prevent a recurrence."

#### Variations on the Theme

*An Agenda for Peace* generated considerable interest and debate, inevitably leading to various modifications, interpretations, expansions of the concept of peacebuilding. Former Australian Foreign Minister Garth Evans, for example, offered a much broader definition of peacebuilding as "a set of strategies which aim to ensure that disputes, armed conflicts and other major crises do not arise in the first place--and if they do arise that they do not subsequently recur." Evans offered two sets of strategies for peacebuilding: international regimes and in-country peacebuilding measures. The former include "international laws, norms, agreements and arrangements ... designed to minimize

threats to security, promote confidence and trust and create frameworks for dialogue and cooperation." In-country peacebuilding measures, on the other hand, are "aimed at economic development, institution building, and, more generally, the creation and restoration within countries of the conditions necessary to make them stable and viable states." Indeed, a subsequent amendment to *An Agenda for Peace* further refined the UN's definition of peacebuilding to include pre-conflict activities.

The Canadian Government's new Peacebuilding Initiative/Fund corresponds quite well with the original conception of peacebuilding. In his 30 October 1996 address, Foreign Minister Axworthy provided the context and rationale for the new initiative and pointed to the critical linkages between human security and peacebuilding. However, he provided a fairly focused definition of peacebuilding when he said:

"I see peacebuilding as casting a life line to foundering societies struggling to end the cycle of violence, restore civility and get back on their feet. After the fighting has stopped and the immediate humanitarian needs have been addressed, there exists a brief critical period when a country sits balanced on a fulcrum. Tilted the wrong way, it retreats into conflict, but with the right help, delivered during the brief, critical window of opportunity, it will move toward peace and stability."

What unites the above definitions is an explicit recognition of the specificity of the peacebuilding agenda and the need to link it to a concrete set of activities and tasks that might help societies to avoid violent conflict or prevent a relapse into violence. While there is no firm consensus, this conception seems to be the most widely accepted with the accompanying set of policy options.

It should be noted, however, that there are those who have expanded the concept of peacebuilding even further, arguing that it is synonymous with "development". This conception of peacebuilding has several variants. Some analysts maintain that peacebuilding is a natural by-product of effective development assistance; others view it as a pre-requisite of development, ranking it alongside environmental sustainability, good governance and gender as indispensable pillars of development assistance. The difficulty with equating peacebuilding with development is that it basically substitutes one elusive concept with another, without addressing the immediate problems that confront conflict-torn societies. Thus, peacebuilding defined as development remains at best a lofty goal rather than a policy approach.

#### Implications of Peacebuilding

Despite the variations among them, several critical assumptions underlie the different conceptions of peacebuilding:

- violent local or regional conflicts in the developing

countries have important international repercussions; while such conflicts do not necessarily pose direct security threats, they place significant strain on the international community, especially the U.N. system;

- the international community has an important role to play in the full range of tasks broadly associated with peacebuilding, from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction;

- effective peacebuilding requires concerted action on the part of the international community;

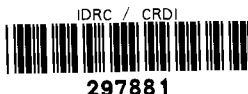
- peacebuilding involves strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to resolve problems without resort to violence;

- while peacebuilding might involve a menu of short-term tasks or activities, its ultimate goal has to be to facilitate long-term stability and development;

Ultimately, the new peacebuilding agenda is a recognition, on the one hand, of the complexity of the developmental and security challenges confronting the international community in the post-Cold War environment, and on the other hand, of the inadequacy of current instruments and institutions of international assistance in dealing with the range of complex emergencies and crises that have emerged. It is unrealistic to expect that the new focus on peacebuilding will, or can, radically alter the current architecture of international development assistance. However, if it is framed within a broader understanding of the crises of development and sources of violent conflict, peacebuilding can have far-reaching ramifications even if it consists of a limited set of interventions that are sharply-focused and have a short life-span.

This is not to argue for a blanket approach or a standard set of tools in response to violent conflicts. It is simply an acknowledgement that intense conflict, more specifically violent conflict, is likely to remain an integral part of the process of development in an increasing number of Third World countries. It should be noted that there is, in fact, a new generation of intra-state conflicts that are significantly different in nature from the earlier wave of national liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, or the subsequent wave of ideologically-based conflicts for state or nation-building. These so-called "Third Generation" conflicts put into sharp relief the failures of development in a growing number of Third World countries. These conflicts are increasingly devoid of a socio-economic programme, involve high levels of decentralized violence, and expose the growing impotence of the state.

If contemporary Third World conflicts have a common thread, it is the inability of the existing political institutions of a society to accommodate, mediate and respond to the pressures arising from profound social transformation and cleavages which



accompany rapid socio-economic change.

Peace, political order and stability have always been recognized by the international community as being critical. However, for too long, political stability and viability were equated with state-centric concepts of security, focusing primarily on modernizing and strengthening the central institutions of the state and of state elites. This focus on regime stability accorded well with Cold War politics as many Third World regimes were artificially propped up and sanctioned by outside powers. It is not coincidental that the numbers of failed or failing states have accelerated in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War. Nor is it coincidental that the international community's earlier concern with regime stability and its reliance on traditional instruments of conflict resolution, peacemaking and peacekeeping have now been supplemented by the new "peacebuilding" agenda.

At a minimum, as a concept and as a policy tool, peacebuilding provides the possibility for the international community to change the way it has hitherto approached the twin issues of security and development. In the final analysis, peacebuilding confronts the challenges of rapid socio-economic and political change, and the need to strengthen the mechanisms and institutions that can steer societies through the arduous path of development. Disembodied from a developmental perspective which links political stability to human security, peacebuilding is bound to remain a short-lived attempt, offering a quick fix to deep-rooted socio-economic and political problems.